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ABSTRACT

The emerging economic paradigm of higher education will make enhancing national productivity the primary goal; emphasize the mastery of learning skills over rote learning; and operate around the principle of customer service, viewing students as customers. Total Quality Management (TQM), as applied to education, shares this focus on customer satisfaction. Advantages of adopting TQM in educational institutions include improved delivery of continuing and vocational education, decreased compartmentalism, improved student services and increased student empowerment, and improved delivery of instruction through new technologies with the focus on mastering learning skills. However, applying TQM and other market-driven business metaphors can have negative consequences, including the tendency to regard students as passive recipients of a commodity, rather than active learners; the "customer is always right" mindset and the potential that faculty will pander to students' desires; the disappearance of questioning and challenging in instruction; confusion and conflict regarding students' needs; and the decline of areas of scholarship that have little commercial value, including the potential death of liberal arts education. These conditions arise, however, from an authoritarian misapplication of the TQM vision. In a true application of TQM, colleges would become communities of learners, with all members of that community committed to furthering the learning process. Contains 26 references. (BCY)

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ARE STUDENTS "CUSTOMERS" OF COLLEGIATE EDUCATION?

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ARE STUDENTS "CUSTOMERS" OF COLLEGIATE EDUCATION?

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INTRODUCTION

"Of education, the governor had this to say, 'Education is an investment. The trouble is, they [the colleges] don't run it like an investment, over there, with the students as customers, because that's what they are, you know. Now they run it like welfare, but I'm telling you, if they don't turn it around themselves, we've got to turn it around for them. This administration believes strongly in education.' " -- the fictional Governor O.T. Early in MOO by Jane Smiley (1, pg.112).

Total Quality Management or TQM has many important principles and techniques to contribute to collegiate science education (2,3,4). TQM features participative management, teamwork, and an analysis of "customer" needs. For problem solving, it prescribes a thorough examination of cause and effect and subsequent data-generating experimentation with hypothetical solutions. These methods encourage the abandonment of a short term, personnel-blaming, crisis management for a continuous, slower, long term approach that finds fault in process. TQM attempts to "design quality in" products; thereby, management works toward "zero defects." The leading proponent of TQM for industry and education, Dr. W. Edwards Deming (2,3), recently deceased, was recognized for his contributions to the postwar success of Japanese industry.

Maurice Holt (4), professor of education of the University of Colorado, Denver, has contributed a concise review of TQM management applied to education. He compared the emphasis on means (processes in TQM) rather than outcomes to Aristotelian ethical reasoning. Holt (4, p.12-13) reasoned, "Deming [TQM] is concerned with the practical link between thought and action . . . When Deming asks us to "build in" quality rather than "inspect it out" at the end, he recognizes the obvious (but often overlooked) point that separating the end from the means is an unhelpful strategy. In any process, we should have regard to how we complete it." Holt continued by quoting Lear (5, p.158), "Aristotle distinguished between ends that are distinct from the actions which produce them and ends that are the activities themselves . . . for acting virtuously is not a means to a distinct end of living a happy life. Acting virtuously constitutes a happy life." Interestingly, Holt added, "Outcome [goal] based education is an oxymoron that should be renamed "outcome based training." Accordingly, Holt stated, "Education can be based on aims, not outcomes." For this reason, many TQM authors reject Peter Drucker's Management by Objectives or MBO (6). For Holt, TQM is a virtuous aim, an Aristotelian "telos," a "clarification of values," a "moral idea" that "will influence all that is done in a school."

Economics and Education

"Business is coming to bear the major responsibility for the kind of education that is necessary for any country to remain competitive in the new economy" -- Davis and Botkin in The Monster Under the Bed (7, pg.15).

The Emerging Economic Paradigm of Higher Education (7)

1. Enhancing national productivity will be the primary goal of higher education. [1]

2. The employees of business and its customers will become the focus of national education policy.

3. The products of schools are the learning skills acquired (value added in TQM) by the potential workforce: learning power = earning power (7, p.16). The mastery of learning skills will replace factual learning as the primary activity of schools.

4. Organizing colleges and universities around the principle of customer service will allow them to successfully compete for students and adapt to a changing marketplace. The relationship between these students and their schools will be lifelong.

Students as Customers

"The university shamelessly promised everything to everyone . . . Students would find jobs, the state would see a return on its educational investment, businesses could harvest enthusiastic and well-trained workers by the hundreds, theory and technology would break through limits as old as the human race (and some lucky person would get to patent the breakthroughs). At the very least, the students could expect to think true, beautiful, and profound thoughts, and thereafter live better lives. At the very, very least students could . . . get high, have sex, and taste freedom and irresponsibility surrounded by the best facilities that money could buy . . . [The university] has become, more than anything, a vast network of interlocking wishes, some of them modest, some of them impossible, many of them conflicting, many of them complementary." MOO, pg.386.

TQM places the needs of "customers" in its primary focus. Quality is defined and measured by "customer satisfaction." Using TQM, graduates and the education they receive would be "fit for purpose," and show "value added" in terms of knowledge and employability (7). Even TQM critic Roy Schwartzman allowed, "Who could argue with improving service or with taking the needs of students into account (9)?"

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1 A survey of 3,400 full-time faculty members, sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, found that 80% agreed with this proposition. See Lewis L and Altbach PG: The dilemma of higher education. Academe 83 (4), July-August: 28-29, 1997.

ADVANTAGES for Students and Educators
Improved delivery of continuing education and vocational education
Decreased compartmentalism and wasteful competition between disciplines achieved through an emphasis on cooperation (from TQM)
Improved services to students for recruitment, orientation, registration and counseling
Students are empowered by becoming participants in structuring the delivery of education. Colleges will adapt to better serve students who no longer live in dorms, work most of the day, and have children to raise (10).
Improved delivery of instruction through the adoption of new technologies, e.g., multimedia, distance learning, etc will occur. Learning processes will be emphasized with the applications and wisdom of knowledge: there will be less emphasis on the acquisition of facts (7).
Increased student and political satisfaction
The classroom will become an "environment" for the exchange of ideas in a non-threatening manner (11).
Revival of liberal arts education if employers value a "general education"

There are reports, too many to refer to, that give glowing accounts of the success of TQM and its "customer service" orientation in collegiate admissions, continuing education, physical plant, printing, and counseling (student services) departments.

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DISADVANTAGES for Students and Educators
Students are regarded as passive recipients of a commodity (rather than active learners) and, as to the assessment of the quality of learning, "The customer is always right."
Faculty will "pander" to the desires of students for material that is instantaneously stimulating and ready to understand (11).
The "Socratic Method" of teaching through questioning and confrontation will disappear; a decrease in challenging, long term assignments (11) will occur.
"Wants" and "needs" of students will be confused (9,12). Immature students (the "whatever" generation) will have too much influence in determining the content and methods of delivery of their instruction (11,13). In a final surrender to an antiauthoritarian consumerism, the value of professional expertise will diminish.
Conflict in the "wants" and "needs" of diverse groups of student customers (e.g., business majors and science majors) will result in either homogenization of their desires and needs, or a *de facto* conformation to the existing administration's priorities (13).
The roles of students as "internal customers" and as "internal and external products" will conflict (9). As empowered internal customers, students may effect the decline of their value as internal products passed to a higher level of study, or as external products passed to an employer.
Scholarship, the disciplined discovery and reinterpretation of knowledge, will decline in those areas that have little commercial value.
The death of liberal arts education

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Kohn (14) suggested that the student as a TQM "customer" or "consumer" of education are invalid terms, and that, generally, business terms applied to education represent "a clash of metaphors." Chiarelott et al. (15) expanded, "Models are metaphorical representations of reality, used to create concrete structures for what is largely an abstraction or image. A model either creates its own language or incorporates the language of another entity. Eventually, this new or incorporated language becomes an accepted form of communication . . . and a new reality is created from the use of the language." Are students "consumers" of information or "products" of education, or persons? Are teachers "managers," "workers," "customers," "suppliers," or "professionals?" Schwartzman (9) admonished, "Cognitively rich metaphors do not arise from merely substituting one term (e.g., customer) for another (e.g., student)."

Are market-driven business metaphors the latest nails sealing the coffin of liberal arts education? In "Crisis in the Academy" (16), Lucas traces the origin of pressures attempting to modify or do away with liberal arts education. The German model of the liberal arts university was based on the unity of teaching, scholarship and research. Certain courses were prescribed of all students to achieve its objective to educate "cultured" citizens. Over time, this model has been corrupted by these forces: (1.) increasing specialization of academic disciplines (16), (2.) egalitarian demands for more freedom to choose courses of study, and (3.) demands of students and businesses to provide training for employment.

Implications for College Teaching

"But in a dozen years of teaching, I haven't forgotten that feeling of being ignominiously marooned . . . I've seen [at U.VA.] older colleagues go through hot embarrassment at not having enough students sign up for their courses: they graded too hard, demanded too much, had beliefs far out of keeping with the existing disposition. And if what's called tenure reform, which generally means the abolishment of tenure -- is broadly enacted, professors will be yet more vulnerable to the whims of their customer students." On the uses of a liberal education: I. As light entertainment for bored students by Mark Edmundson (11).

Successful attacks on tenure and grade inflation are obvious signs that colleges have, to some degree, acceded to the exigencies of a capitalist culture that regards education and educators as commodities serving the needs of student customers.

The business community and politicians like "Gov. O.T. Early" and President Clinton have challenged educators to adopt new philosophies. In order to move from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy, we must change from a mastery of data (factual learning) to a mastery of learning skills (7, p.16). "Declining institutions seldom reinvigorate themselves with new technologies, and schools are no exception (7, p.83)." Therefore, learning will migrate to the customers of business and its employees, Davis and Botkin (7) concluded. The structure of the "education factory," where productivity is measured by the number of classes an instructor teaches (17), is the 'molasses' through which higher education reform must swim.

It is ironic that nobly conceived democratic management principles (e.g., Drucker's Management by Objectives and Deming's Total Quality Management) have come to threaten liberal arts education (9,16). I believe that the problem is their misapplication

rather than their conception. MBO promulgated the ideal that individual workers would set objectives for their performance directed to attaining the larger goals of the organization, which the workers had help set. Through consultation, those goals would become consonant with the goals of higher levels of management (administration) (5,18). However, a *daemon* of MBO was unleashed at faculty when Management by Objectives was corrupted by autocratic administrations to "dictation by objectives" (17).

The vision of TQM applied to education is that colleges would become communities of learners; all members of the learning community, (e.g., the internal customers -- students, faculty, and administrators) of the institution, are committed to furthering the processes of learning (7,18,19). That noble aim perpetuates the ideals of a liberal arts education by institutionalizing the "unity of teaching, scholarship and research." Speaking of measures of faculty quality in a liberal arts education, Deming (2, p.173) acknowledged, "The only operational definition of knowledge requisite for teaching is research. Research need not be earthshaking. It may be only a new derivation of principles already established. Publication of original research in reputable journals is an index of achievement. This is an imperfect measure, but none better has been found."

Guskin's vision of the emerging learning community emphasizes the interactions of students and faculty, students with electronic media, and students with peers. "Faculty, in turn, will work with greater numbers of students but 'teach' much less" (20). However, a *daemon* of the "student as customer" application may become evident when the student, through increased use of technology and individualized instruction at a distance [distance learning!], withdraws from the "community of learners" envisioned by TQM. Legislators and administrators must give serious thought to the quality of the student products of distance education. Will eighteen-year-olds have the discipline to learn effectively? Will on-line, open book testing be adequate to motivate and evaluate that learning? Certainly the external customers that employ these graduates will find out!

Davis and Botkin questioned whether businesses [or schools?] can be learning organizations; that is, process oriented like TQM. Instead they apparently promoted a retreat to the MBO (predicated upon inspection of the students and teachers) ideal of a "teaching organization." "Teaching is a measurable product where learning is not measurable, and it is an "activity . . . with no guarantee that they [the students] will give more back than they take in (7, pg.111)." Typically, as TQM has been applied to businesses and educational institutions, the "bean counters" take over. Increasingly, student evaluations of teachers, contrary to the principles of TQM, have become the norm by which teachers can be inspected for quality, thereby fulfilling the imperative "to measure" (17).[2] Accordingly, recent studies indicate that instructors are pandering to student customers by inflating grades and increasing the "entertainment value" of courses (21).

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[2] Alumni are not merely former consumers of information; they are the products of teaching and learning. In that unique position, their success is a reliable, but largely unassessed, measure (TQM check) of institutional effectiveness. For a good faith effort to do performance-based (rather than information-based) assessment of the internal and external customers of business education courses, see Vazzana GS and Winter JK et al. J of Educ for Business 72 (5): p.313, May/Jun, 1997.

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Conclusions

" 'The people of this state are watching those pinheads, and they had better watch their step.' When asked if he meant 'eggheads,' a common term for university intellectuals, Governor Early said, 'Pinheads, eggheads, knuckleheads, what's the difference?' " (pg.395). "They're all closet deconstructionists over there." (pg.328) -- MOO.

In the present more conservative political climate, the Emerging Economic Paradigm for schools may be more likely to influence the thinking of the external customers of education, that is, employers of our graduates, legislators, and society, than the noble ideals of searching for truth and educating cultured citizens.

Are we, the privileged elite of higher education, dispensing knowledge like welfare to needy students (see above)? Collegiate education is being attacked by politicians, "tapping the fears of Americans about the cost of higher education by demonizing colleges and universities as radical, slack, . . . wasteful" (22), hindered by tenured 'deadwood,' and unconcerned about our student customers![3] Most CEOs in Georgia favor privatizing public education (23), apparently for these reasons. Will faculty accept this stigma by default? Our collective morale may be revealed by an ineffectual response to the Georgia Board of Regents' (University System) "modification of tenure" to a five-year tenure maintenance requirement. As noted above, they did away with it![4]

Faculty members are typically focused on disciplinary matters and are disinterested in management methods, unless they directly affect their discipline work (24,25). Moreover, witness the abhorrence of the term "management" as TQM was quickly renamed Continuous Quality Improvement in educational settings. Most faculty do not like to think of their activities being managed. But, anyone who is being paid to teach classes held at specific times or who is held accountable for research and grant production is being managed.

Management theories like TQM/CQI and MBO share a belief in the desire of workers to improve their own work and the collective work of their institution. They share a belief in participative management in the best of democratic traditions. When properly applied to higher education, TQM should increase the morale of both students and faculty through a shared commitment to the "telos" of achieving quality education. TQM uses a scientific method to solve problems; in that, it should have no lack of support among the scientists here gathered.

[3] Legislators may foresee fewer suppliers needed to satisfy the student and external customers. On the other hand, student customers may cause the demise of the infamous five-hundred-students auditorium lectures, thereby driving up the costs of traditional instruction in the "education factory."

[4] Deming admonished, "It is worthy of note that the 80 American Nobel Prize winners all had tenure, security (2, pg.109)."

However, even as TQM promulgated managers as "facilitators" of the decisions of democratically organized, problem solving teams (2,3,8), the drive to eliminate "variations" in learning will be used by politicians and administrators who see in TQM a new and disguised way to control faculty and protect themselves (13). Eliminating variation in instruction can be misapplied, doing away with idiosyncratic teaching methods, no matter their effectiveness (13,17). "From an exact repeatability point of view, jobs would be best done by robots, computerized lessons, or videotapes of professional actors following a carefully crafted script. Indeed, some TQM advocates see use of telecourses, or distance learning technologies, as a central strategy" (13).

The antithesis of Deming's instruction to "drive out fear," one of what Deming (2, pg. 97) called "deadly diseases" of management, i.e., periodic performance and merit evaluations (student evaluations of instructor behavior fall in the same category), will be carried out under the banner of the TQM imperative "to check" for quality (13,17).

College administrations can promote the democratic ideals of a Management by Objectives or a Total Quality Management while increasing the numbers of powerless part-time faculty (of inconsistent quality) during, of course, a full-time faculty hiring freeze. Expediency rules![5] Then more of Deming's "deadly diseases" take hold -- emphasis on short-term gains and lack of "constancy of purpose" (2, pg. 98-99).

It may be true that the road to the future is blocked by the guardians of the past. Many assembled here see a future of educating science students by actively learning principles and methods rather than memorizing facts that are quickly forgotten. Many here see new technologies as a means of educating our students better. Although higher education faculty are stereotyped as radical and self-consumed, the reality is that most care deeply about our students and disciplines. We may be the real conservatives, defending the values of liberal arts education, tenure and academic freedom, in the midst of a radical, economically driven revolution (the outlines of which we are beginning to discern).

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[5]The U.S. National Center for Education Statistics reported that between 1970 and 1995, the percentage of part-time faculty in higher education nearly doubled from 22 to 41 percent. See http://nces.ed.gov.pubs98/98228.html (March, 1998); also, Advocate for NEA Members in Higher Education XV (5): pg.3, April, 1998.

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